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STANFIELD HALL.

By J. F. SMITH,

Author of "Minnigrey," "Woman and Her Master," &c.



Illustrated by Sir JOHN GILBERT, R.A.
AND OTHER EMINENT ARTISTS.

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[THE EARL OF WARWICK AND DAME ALICE.]



steps he took to redress them. He appointed a Commission for making an inquiry concerning inclosures, and issued a proclamation ordering all the late ones to be laid open by a certain day. The populace meeting such countenance from the Government, rose in several places, and committed great excesses; and, under pretence that the Commission would be eluded, sought for a remedy for their complaints by force of arms.

The rising began in several parts of England, as if a universal conspiracy had been formed by the commonalty.

A few days before the insurrection broke out, Walter and Mary had, after an absence of many years, returned to Norwich, and taken possession of the humble but comfortable abode of their old friend Steadman, who felt prouder on the day which enabled him to offer a home to his master's child, than if a kingly sword had dubbed him a knight upon the field of battle. One chief object of the visit to Norfolk was to abstract, if possible, from the muniment room at Stanfield certain papers, the possession of which, in happier times, might restore the children of the heiress to their mother's lost inheritance.

It was market-day, and vast quantities of wool were exposed to the buyers or agents, who regularly attended to purchase it for the foreign manufacturer. The wives of the poorer classes wandered through the then unpaved square, with discontented looks, but little food was exposed for sale. Turn where they would, they found nothing but wool—wool; while the poor creatures required bread—bread.

"Pass on, gossips! pass on!" exclaimed Mike Maze, the burly tax-collector, who, escorted by a couple of halberdiers, was receiving the Corporation dues; "this is not the flesh-market!"

"We know that as well as you do," said several of the women.

"Oh! do you?" replied the functionary; "then clear the way, and don't interrupt me in the execution of my duty; the corn-market lies at the other end of the church; off with you!"

"And where are we to get money to buy bread with?" demanded several; "and at such a price?"

"Or bread to buy, even if we had the money?" added another; "England is turned into a sheep-walk!"

"Would I had been born a sheep!" cried a hump-backed little tailor, whose lean appearance showed that he had long been a stranger to good food, or else that it had been thrown away upon him; "I should be well fed then, and taken care of."

"That's a seditious wish," observed the collector with disgust, for his stomach absolutely recoiled at the idea of Bumpy Jem, the cognomen by which the half-starved tailor was generally known, being converted into a sheep, an animal for certain portions of which he had great respect; "but you were always an ambitious rascal, and ought to be punished."

"What! for wishing to be a sheep?" demanded the offender, who was the wit of the mob.

"Certainly."

"What, then, do you deserve," added the tailor with a grin, "whose offence so much exceeds mine?"

"How so?" said the functionary; "how so?"

"In wishing all your life to be a calf, and having been one without knowing it."

The burst of applause which followed this retort of poor Bumpy Jem told that the jest was relished, and excited the ire of the collector to a furious pitch. Snatching the partisan from the hand of one of his attendants, he struck the poor fellow a violent blow over the head with it; the stroke was followed by blood; and the poor little hunchback measured his length upon the ground.

"Shame! shame!" exclaimed the women, raising him; "that's a foul blow."

Mike Maze was about to repeat the outrage, when a burly, thick-set man, in the dress of a respectable tradesman, sprang through the mob and wrenched the weapon from his hand.

"Bravo, Ket—bravo! Down with him! the tunbelly—down with him!"

The remaining officer was about to use his halberd, when a stone thrown by some unseen hand struck him on the temple. The blow was fatal; with a groan the instrument of tyranny fell a corpse in the market-place. The collector and the disarmed companion of the dead man fled. For the space of a minute there was a breathless pause amongst the crowd of idlers whom the dispute had attracted to the spot. Ket looked pale but determined; he knew that he had long made himself obnoxious to the authorities by his advocacy of the people, and that the whole weight of their resentment would fall on him. It was a relief, therefore, when one loud hearty cheer from the populace told him that the action was approved.

The news spread like wild-fire through the market-place. Bumpy Jem had hitherto been the people's fool, their wit, and sometimes their counsellor. Wounded and bleeding, he now appeared to them as their martyr. Some of the men began to quietly break up the stalls for weapons; many of the women ran screaming through the streets, so that in an inconceivably short space of time a report was spread that an insurrection, headed by Ket the tanner, had broken out before he had even thought of defence.

"Friends," he exclaimed, "patience has its limits. Are we to be trampled like dust beneath our proud masters' feet, or show ourselves like men?"

"We will—we will!" chorussed the mob.

"A crisis has arrived—nothing like meeting danger boldly."

"Nothing—nothing!" echoed his admirers.

"Always take the bull by the horns, Robert," quietly observed his brother, who was a butcher, a fellow of the most stolid temperament, and strongly attached to his more sanguine relative.

"Strike, then," exclaimed the bold, adventurous man, "for your birthright—your fair share in the soil of England. The poor man's farm—the common—is inclosed. Why should the noble's chase be more respected? Your honest labour—the means which God hath given you to repair the injustice of your fellow man—is rendered valueless; the fields remain untilled, the land unsown. 'Wool, wool!' is the noble's cry. Let him not complain if the people answer, 'Bread!'"

"Hurrah!" cried the now excited mob; "our cry is bread—bread for our wives and children."

"Meet me, then, at Wymondham. There let us throw down the inclosures and encamp; it will give the starving peasant and the labourer an opportunity to rally round us. Shut up within the walls of Norwich, we are powerless."

"But we can return," exclaimed Bumpy Jem, who had recovered from the blow which was the original cause of the tumult, "and crack the walls of the city like a hazel nut."

"And roast the kernel," added a voice in the crowd.

"We will return," resumed the orator, "clad in the people's strength and the justice of their cause. Away at once: here we may be crushed. In the city we are within the grasp of a pigmy's glove; in the country a giant's hand were powerless. Remember our cry—'God and the commons!'"

"God and the commons!" repeated the people; and in a few minutes the market-place was cleared. During the day the unemployed workmen and the discontented of every class poured in one continuous stream through St. Stephen's Gate on their way to Wymondham. The authorities were paralysed, and the city was morally lost before the enemy returned to attack it.

The rebels—for such, we presume, they must be called—occupied themselves for several days in throwing open the inclosed lands, and burning, wherever they found them, the farmers' and the nobles' stocks of wool, which, as the rents were not unfrequently paid in kind, were often considerable.

Their numbers at last became so vast, that they decided on something further than the throwing open of the commons—restoring the old religious establishments, the loss of which, before the establishment of poor-laws, was so severely felt by the poorer classes. As the first step to their design, it was agreed the following morning to attack the city. Wymondham, where the insurgents were encamped, our readers will recollect, is close to the old domain of Stanfield.

The moon was shining clearly, darting its silver rays through the green foliage, and lighting at broken intervals the mossy glade,

along which three horsemen were quietly wending their way. The foremost was our old acquaintance Patch, his companions Walter and Steadman.

"How beautifully," observed the younger of the three, "the moon holds forth her lamp to light us on our way!"

"Say rather, like a coquette dealing out her smiles and frowns; for several times a black cloud, like the veil of a Spanish beauty, has obscured her visage, and caused my steed to stumble."

"Give me a dark night, especially when I know my ground," observed the old soldier; "the moon, like the lovely dames you speak of, has betrayed many a gallant fellow to death. I ask for no better light than the glow-worm's lamp to-night."

"Why so, old Honesty?" demanded the jester.

"We are too near the rebels," replied the veteran, "to render it either desirable or safe; and the less we converse the better. We shall soon reach the hall; let us ride on in silence."

It was seen that the caution was not a vain one, for the little party had not proceeded many paces further before they were challenged by the rough voice of a sentinel, demanding with an affectation of military discipline:

"Who goes there?"

"Minions of the moon," was the jester's quick reply.

"That's not the word," replied the insurgent; "shall I shoot him, Jem?"

"No," replied the sharp voice of the hunchback; "let's take them prisoners."

"But there are three," urged his companion.

"The greater the honour," said the tailor, at the same time emerging from the underwood, where, with his comrade, he had been concealed, and confronting the party as they advanced down the glade. "Stand!"

"In whose name?" inquired Walter.

"The people's."

A momentary halt took place, and the three travellers, inwardly cursing the interruption, hastily consulted what would be the best course to pursue, when a shrill whistle rang through the wood. It was answered, although at considerable distances, on every side, and in a few minutes various bodies of men, armed with scythes, bows, and roughly-formed pikes, were seen emerging in every direction from the underwood. Resistance would have been useless; it was plain they were surrounded by the insurgents, and completely in their power.

"Three of the enemy," exclaimed Ket the butcher, who was one of the leaders.

"Spies," echoed the band. "String them up to the loftiest oak."

"The lowest of these might answer," interrupted Patch, pointing, at the same time, to the superb forest of trees on either side. "But

before you proceed to extremities, ask yourselves one question, my good fellows."

"What is that?" exclaimed their captors.

"What good will it do you? Our purses are not very heavy; but, such as they are, you are welcome to them. Our steeds may serve to mount your cavalry," he added, with an imperceptible sneer; "and as for our skins, although your leader is a tanner, he would hardly wish you to hang us for the sake of them."

"That's more than I'll answer for," replied the butcher.

"At least," observed Walter, "let him decide for himself."

After a few moments' consultation, it was arranged that the prisoners should be conducted to the hall, where Robert Ket had taken up his quarters; for, like most popular leaders, as soon as he became formidable, he aped the state he had previously denounced. It is astonishing how very seldom patriotism can stand the test of success.

"And where are you taking us to?" demanded Steadman, as they urged the horses of the captives onward.

"To Stanfield," was the reply.

"To Stanfield," said the old soldier, his countenance suddenly brightening up—"with all my heart; there are worse places to pass the night in than Stanfield, at least to my thinking."

By his companions in misfortune this was understood as a secret encouragement to them not to despair, and the event proved that they were not wrong in their supposition.

In the great hall of the old mansion was a fire composed of fragments of carved benches and broken furniture, which had hastily been piled together, to spare the insurgents the trouble of cutting fuel: as in most cases of popular commotion, the men who were in arms for their own rights respected very little those of others. Sheep and deer, half-skinned and mangled in an uncraftsmanlike manner, were lying piled together in different parts of the hall, some of the carcasses serving as pillows for the drunken, sleepy patriots; others were busy in furbishing up partisans and weapons from the armoury, which neglect and long disuse rendered unfit for service.

Robert Ket, the leader of this motley band, was pacing with moody strides before the blazing fire when his prisoners were introduced. He had heard from sure intelligence that the Marquis of Northampton, with a considerable body of troops, had been despatched against him. This nobleman had just returned from the relief of Exeter, which had been besieged by the rebels. There, in conjunction with Lord Gray and Batista Spinola, leader of the German horse in the English pay, he had defeated the insurgents, and hanged one of their leaders, the Catholic vicar of St. Thomas, from the steeple of his own church, arrayed in his vestments. He threatened to do the same with Robert Ket. The threat was ful-

filled, although the marquis did not live to witness it. These and other circumstances had induced the chief of the rebels to march at once to Norwich.

"Who are these?" he demanded of Bumpy Jem and his companions, as they marshalled the captives before him.

"Prisoners," replied the hunchback, at the same time making a ludicrous effort to salute the tanner in a military style.

"Where taken?"

"In the chase of Stanfield."

"Where, I presume," interrupted Walter, "none will dispute my right to ride, when it is remembered that I am the husband of the heiress of its ancient lords."

"We'll have no lords," said one of the men. "The land is for those who till it."

"We'll be our own lords," exclaimed the hunchback, with a gravity which produced a smile upon the features of the jester, despite the critical position in which he and his companions stood.

"Are you Walter Lucas?" demanded Ket, walking close to our hero, and scanning him narrowly.

"I am."

"What proof can you give?"

"Proof!" exclaimed the old soldier; "I'll vouch for him. You know me, Master Ket, and no man who does that ever could accuse John Steadman of a lie. This is Walter Lucas, our lady's husband."

"And where is your lady?" continued their interrogator.

"In London with her family," replied the jester, whose conscience was not quite so susceptible as the veteran's.

"That's bad," said the tanner; "her presence here would have had great influence with the people. Still you may, perchance, serve the cause as well. We require men of experience," he added; "practical men. We have thews and limbs enough, but lack the skill to train them. You and the old soldier both have served, and——"

"Hear me," replied Walter; "much as I feel for the wrongs of the commons, violence and bloodshed are not the means to redress them. Let not the flush of a first and last success deceive you."

"And what are the means?" exclaimed the tanner sternly. "To crouch like slaves and lick the armed heel which treads the life-blood from a land—crushes the cottage while it respects the palace; to wait with hound-like patience till the insatiate maw of our oppressors is so gorged with victims that repletion leaves the worn helot a moment's time to breathe. You are not the first from whom I've heard such doctrines. Wilt thou join us?"

"Never!" exclaimed the captive firmly.

A low murmur rose amongst the men. It is astonishing, when once unchained, how soon our passions lead us to cruelty. The taste of blood and plunder which the rebels had enjoyed increased

their appetite for more ; they were like young tigers, who just began to feel that they had claws and fangs, and longed to use them.

"At least," said Patch, with a look of caution, "you will consider of the offer. Remember you, too, have suffered by the tyranny of Edward and his father. You have wrongs to avenge, rights to assert, and a triumphant people are, as history proves, *sure to be grateful.*"

The sneer which the last words conveyed—if even the look had been wanting—convinced our hero that the speaker's real object was to procrastinate and obtain time or opportunity for escape. He determined to follow it, but did not think it prudent to appear to yield too soon.

"Give me a few hours to reflect," he cried.

"To escape, you mean," replied the tanner, with a frown.

"If you think that," interrupted Steadman, "place us in the chamber of the warder's tower ; there is not a loophole in it that a well-fed cat could creep through, and the door is of solid iron. Doubt not but by the morning you will find him reasonable."

"Be it so," said the leader ; "the people give you till to-morrow."

"Good," observed Patch ; "the people are always generous."

"Hear !" cried several of the rustics near him. "Give him a flask of wine," added another, "from the cellar we plundered at Cotessy. He is an excellent patriot."

"You mistake, friend," said the jester, taking the proffered gift from the hand of the speaker ; "*I am only a philosopher.*"

"I suppose you don't mean to starve us ?" exclaimed Steadman.

The appeal was met by huge pieces of meat being stuffed into the hands of the speaker ; the donors kindly assuring him that if they hanged him in the morning they would at least feed him to-night.

So important did the leader of the insurgents deem the safe keeping of his prisoners, that he accompanied them himself to the warder's tower, the upper chamber of which was without even a window to admit the light of day, and the inhabitants were only enabled to breathe from the air supplied by the narrow loopholes in the walls. After satisfying himself of the security of his captives, Ket turned the key in the massive lock of the iron door, thrust it into his bosom, and left them to their reflections.

"You have selected an agreeable lodging, old friend," exclaimed Walter, after he had paced for a few minutes up and down the chamber.

"At any rate, a secure one," quietly replied Steadman.

The jester, in his turn, was somewhat puzzled ; he had carefully examined the walls, and convinced himself that there was no secret passage, or hidden means of egress, as he at first suspected ; still there was a cheerful look about the old soldier in which he trusted.

"Secure enough," repeated our hero ; "the butchers will find us in the pen to-morrow when they seek us."

"Doubtless, master," said the aged follower ; "but the difficulty will be to get into the pen to-morrow."

"What mean you ?"

"My life on it," said Patch, "but Steadman winds them still."

The faithful servitor of the former lord of Stanfield led his companions towards the door, which, as we before stated, was of iron, and locked in a frame of the same material, the whole of which was apparently a fixture in the masonry. We say apparently, for on pressing certain knobs in the lock, the door, frame and all, sank in the grooves cut in the solid wall beneath, and a second door and frame descended from corresponding grooves cut in the wall above : the only difference was this, that the massive lock and bars which fastened them on the first door were on the outside, but on the second they were placed within.

"A contrivance worthy of the Medici," said the jester, struck by the ingenuity of the arrangement.

"At least, it has well served our turn," added Walter.

The coarse jests and loud mirth of the rebels, as they became gorged with the strong ale, wine, and mead plundered from the neighbouring nobles, had been for some time lulled to rest before the three captives ventured to release themselves from their prison, and, guided by Steadman, descend to the muniment-room, where they found, amid the fragments of papers, books, and parchments, the precious charters which conferred the lands originally upon the ancestors of the Lady Mary, William the Conqueror's confirmation of them, as well as those of the succeeding Norman kings.

The great purport of their visit being accomplished, fearful of detection, they left the house as secretly as possible, and finding horses in the chase, returned to Norwich, from whence they started again at an early hour to London, long before the rebels thought of advancing towards the city.

On the following day Ket and his followers took possession of Monkshold Heath, near the city, and there held a species of tribunal under an oak, which for many ages after was known as the Oak of Reformation ; from which place he summoned the gentry to appear before him, and issued decrees as impolitic as they were ridiculous and cruel. On the heath was a noble mansion, called Mount Surrey, which the Earl of Surrey had built on the priory of St. Leonard's. This was seized, plundered of its contents, and converted into a prison ; the priory chapel, which the earl had previously changed into a dovecote, was burnt, and its ruins still go by the popular name of Ket's Castle.

During the time which the chief and his followers remained in their camp, seemingly without any definite purpose, a constant intercourse was kept up between the insurgents and the city, the

Mayor of which had been several times summoned before the Oak of Reformation, where, as Fuller quaintly remarks, justice was so religiously administered, that one of the city vicars was compelled to read morning and evening prayers to men whose hands were red with blood. All the deer in the neighbouring parks were brought to the camp, and so plentiful was the supply of other meat, that a fat sheep sold for fourpence; twenty thousand, it is said, were consumed in a few days. While they were thus spending their time in feasting and rioting, the authorities were equally neglectful. The council at first only sent a herald with an offer of pardon if they would disperse; nor was it till the Marquis of Northampton, at the head of an army of fifteen hundred men, had been defeated, and Lord Sheffield slain by the rebels, that serious measures were adopted, and the Earl of Warwick (who was about departing with an army to renew the war with Scotland), sent to Norwich instead, whither he arrived, and encamped in the market-place. For a while the good fortune which had hitherto attended the insurgents followed them; the whole of the ammunition belonging to the royal army fell into their hands, and shortly after they succeeded in capturing the artillery also. The earl was now obliged to shut himself up in the city, and defend himself by fortifying the gates, streets, lanes, and dykes, in the best manner he was able. Some of his officers were urgent that he should quit the city as untenable, but Warwick replied that he would do so only with his life, and compelled his captains, in accordance with an ancient custom observed in times of great danger, to kiss each others' swords and vow to defend the place and each other to the last extremity. The next day a reinforcement of fourteen hundred men, consisting of a Swiss regiment and veterans, arrived, and the general resolved upon attacking the rebels in their camp.

But Ket did not wait for the attack. An ancient prophecy, said to be of ancient date, was circulated amongst his followers to animate their courage. To this day it is repeated by village gossips and aged crones. It ran thus:

"The country gnofes, Hob, Dick, and Hick,
With clubs and clouted shoon,
Shall fill the vale
Of Dussin's dale
With slaughter'd bodies soon."

Either trusting the prediction, which was first delivered to him by an old woman renowned for her skill in herbs and spells, or desirous of availing himself of the enthusiasm it had excited amongst his followers, Ket resolved to quit his vantage-ground and attack the enemy. It was on the 27th of August that the rebels marched from Monkshold Heath into the adjacent dale, where they made hasty preparations for battle by cutting a ditch and planting stakes in front of their position.

The Swiss troops commenced the attack by a furious charge, in which several of the most important citizens, who had been detained as hostages by Ket, and inhumanly placed, bound, in the van, were killed. The insurgents were beaten after the first charge of the cavalry, and the battle became a mere scene of flight and slaughter. About three thousand were slain in the pursuit. Ket fled so swiftly that his horse broke down at the end of a few miles ; he was recognised by the servants of a house where he took refuge, and, together with his brother, delivered into the hands of the triumphant Warwick. Many of the prisoners were hanged upon the Oak of Reformation, and forty-nine hanged and quartered in the market-place ; altogether three hundred were sacrificed, to strike terror to the hearts of others.

In the council-chamber, which had been hastily fitted up in Norwich Castle, were assembled, besides the victorious Warwick, the principal leaders of his army, the captains of the foreign mercenaries, the mayor and gentry of the city, and a mixed crowd of citizens and civilians. Strongly guarded and heavily chained were two captives—the butcher and the tanner. Dick, the former, retained his usual impassibility of feature ; the latter, on the contrary, like most men of sanguine temperament who experience violent reverses, was completely crushed by his misfortune. Vainly his companion tried to cheer him.

“Do what they will to us, brother,” he whispered, “it can’t last long ; we have only so much life to be expended—so much blood to shed ; and even if they take it drop by drop, it must come to an end at last.”

“True,” sighed Robert.

“I never knew,” continued the comforter, “an ox linger more than ten minutes ; and I don’t think I am half as strong as an ox.”

The speaker’s well-meant consolations were interrupted by the Earl of Warwick, who proceeded at once to the purpose for which the prisoners had been brought before him—namely, to sentence them to death—a death so fearful, that its horror almost redeems the madness of their crime.

“Rebels and traitors,” he began, “the hand of outraged authority at last is raised to avenge society, religion, and all that is estimable in the great social compact which binds mankind together. Yours have been no common crimes, and you shall meet no common doom. *Alive* shall you both be hanged in an iron frame—one from the keep of Norwich Castle, the other from the spire of Wymondham Church—a warning to all traitors.”

“An example,” added Ket, whose energy the indignation which he felt at the barbarity of his sentence had revived—“an example to all future martyrs for the people’s rights. The chattering crow may perch upon my swinging bones, and, as the night wind whistles through them, contented tyranny rejoice my spirit’s fled : it will

but cheat itself. In every groan of my creaking fetters that spirit shall revive, and children through future ages mark the spot where, like an avenging beacon placed on high, the poor man's martyr died."

"Silence him!" exclaimed Warwick.

"You cannot silence time," replied the prisoner. "Think of me, earl, when thine own hour shall come."

On a signal from the earl, the two brothers were secured by a party of the Swiss soldiery, and dragged from the council-chamber to the courtyard of the castle, where the elder Ket, who was to suffer at Wymondham, was bound hand and foot with cords, and cast, like a sack of wheat, over the back of a trooper's horse; in which fashion, amidst the derision of the soldiery and the jeers of the multitude, he was conveyed to the place of execution.

"Good-bye, Robert!" he exclaimed; "I have a rough ride before me; but the longest journey has an end, and we shall meet again at last."

His brother would have kissed him, but the foreign mercenaries would not allow him even that consolation. In this world they never met again.

By Warwick's orders a strong iron frame had been prepared, large enough to hold the body of a man in an upright position, but not sufficiently roomy to permit him to turn. A chain was attached to the cross-bar at the top by means of a swivel, so that the infernal contrivance could be hung from the walls of the castle, and turn as it swung in the night air.

Ket gazed upon his living tomb with an unmoved countenance, and submitted, with a look of resignation, to be stripped by the executioners to his hose, which was no sooner done than they thrust him into the iron frame, and riveted the bars in front so firmly, that it would have required the blow of a sledge hammer to break them. No sooner was the victim inclosed, than Warwick and the members of the council descended into the courtyard. The preparations were complete.

"Now, traitor," exclaimed the cruel earl, "dost thou repent thy treason?"

"I repent my sins," replied the unhappy Ket, "but I go to a Judge more merciful than thou art."

"Up with the villain!"

"We shall meet again," shrieked the victim; "be it thy terror here to know that we shall meet again. When the headsman's stroke shall sunder the thread of thy polluted life, and thy scared soul shall yell before the Judgment-seat for mercy, thy victim's voice shall drown the cry, deafening the ear of Pity. Monster! the curse of blood is on thy soul—coward as cruel—fiend!"

The fearful denunciations of the speaker ceased to be heard, as the frightful machine in which he was confined rose to the level

of the lofty battlements, to which it was drawn by a party of men who were stationed on the walls. Here the end of the chain was passed over a thick iron bar, which bar was again cemented into the solid stonework. For many hours not a cry escaped the victim, but as the day wore on the pangs of thirst became dreadful, and his groans were distinctly heard. Horror chained many of the spectators, who were assembled within the inclosed space between the moats, like statues to the spot. The shrieks of the sufferer at last became so terrific that the people fled, and even the obscene night-bird which had been fluttering near, impatient of its prey, lazily flapped its heavy wings and retired, scared from its living banquet.

By this time it was midnight, and the earl, wrapped in a horseman's cloak, issued quietly and stealthily from a small postern opposite the drawbridge. No sentinel challenged him as he passed, for it was an order given to the guard that all who either left or arrived by that postern should pass unquestioned. When on the bridge, Warwick paused, and cast a cold, ferocious glance upon his victim, who still swung in the night air, and whose occasional shrieks startled the soldier on his lonely rounds.

"The headsman?—no, no," he muttered, alluding to Ket's prediction, which had made a deeper impression on him than he chose to acknowledge. "I will at least provide against that. I play a bold, and consequently a dangerous game, but it shall never lead me to the scaffold."

So thought the speaker's father, Dudley the extortioner, as he was called, and both were alike deceived.

The earl made his way cautiously to a small stone cottage, built out of the ruins of the monastery of Grey Friars, which were scattered about at random over the piece of land formerly the convent close. This was a locality carefully avoided by the superstitious citizens, especially at night; for the inmate, an aged woman, known by the name of Mother Alice, was supposed to hold communication with the beings of another world. In her intercourse with those who sought her—and they were neither few nor poor who did so—she conducted herself more like a priestess of some long-forgotten superstition, than a simple vendor of poisons, drugs, and medicines; for it was generally believed that all the three might be bought of Alice by those who could pay down the sum she asked for her doubtful ministry. The only inmates besides herself of the lonely hut was a raven, superstitiously believed to be a familiar spirit, although, to judge from its appearance, it was nothing more than an ordinary bird, and a brindled cat.

"Enter!" exclaimed a deep voice, as Warwick knocked with the handle of his dagger on the oaken door. "Enter, if you come in the name of sin and despair."

"What if I come in the name of Heaven, dame?" replied the earl.

"Then you have mistaken your road. Pass on—pass on; for sin and sorrow only visit here."

There was something so peculiarly sad in the speaker's tone, that the visitor resolved at once to speak with her, and, raising the rude latch, entered the house.

"Croak—croak," went the voice of the raven, and the bird, generally so bold to all visitors, retreated at once to its usual resting-place. Dame Alice started to her feet.

The cottage was so dark that the visitor could scarcely distinguish the person of its mistress; she seemed like an ill-defined shadow, flitting between him and the rude species of stone hearth on which a fire of wood was, or rather had been, burning; for the red embers only remained, and cast a sickly, uncertain light around.

"What would the Earl of Warwick with me?" demanded the mistress of the house.

"You know me, mother?"

"Yes," said the woman, "as you do me—by fame?"

"Fame!"

"Ay, we have both our reputations," added the hag, with a sneer, "and both alike are evil."

"'Tis well," said her visitor. "I would have a draught which at a soldier's need might defeat the malice of his enemies—place death between him and the headsman's office. Dost understand me, mother?"

"Ay," groaned the woman.

"Wilt serve my will in this?"

He heard the mistress of the cottage moving about the floor, and occasionally a dark shadow passed between him and the faint light which the red embers gave. At last an arm from the mass of thick drapery which screened her figure was extended towards him: in the hand was a small phial.

"Take it," said the woman; "but do not touch me, as you value your life."

He took the phial, and cast a purse of money upon the table.

"Keep thy gold," said the woman. "In serving thee I serve myself."

"Hast thou no other poison?" demanded the earl; "one of a nature so subtle that, dropped upon a flower or kerchief, it would war with life, nor quit the contest till victorious?"

"Ay," said the sorceress, "*one fit for a king to fall by.*"

"Give it me," said the speaker, eagerly, "and I will pay thee for it ten times more than for the first."

"Take it," again exclaimed the woman, "and now begone. We shall meet again—once again—and then, my lord, both our careers will be near their close."

"What mean you, hag?"

The woman cast a handful of some perfumed wood upon the

fire, and in an instant the cottage of the mediciner was filled not only with a sweet perfume, but illuminated by a light so intense that every nook and corner became distinctly visible; and, to Warwick's terror and surprise, he discovered in the woman the mother of the boy whom he had so brutally slain on the night of the Princess Mary's escape from Kimbolton.

"Murderer!" she shrieked, "thy career will soon be ended—my boy will be avenged."

The earl rushed upon her with his sword, which he had hastily drawn, when she darted on one side, and, seizing a species of staff, struck a violent blow upon an earthen globe suspended over the fire. The vessel was shivered into a thousand fragments, and the contents fell upon the blazing embers. In an instant the hut was filled with a vapour so intense, that Warwick was blinded by its effects, and wildly struck at random. When the mist dispersed, he was alone within the cottage—the hag was gone.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WARWICK'S success against the rebels considerably increased his interest with the Court party, whom the pride and arrogance of Somerset had gradually disgusted; for no sooner had he obtained the patent which invested him with the exercise of the regal authority, than he ceased to pay attention to the other executors and councillors of the king's will. All who were not devoted to him were certain to be neglected, and whoever opposed his views were sure to be treated with neglect and contempt. Unfortunately, while he thus manifested a resolution to govern everything his own way, his capacity did not appear proportioned to his ambition. Warwick, more subtle and artful, concealed his dangerous views under fairer appearances. He still professed himself the friend of the man whose downfall he was secretly plotting; and having associated himself with the Earl of Southampton, he formed a strong party, who were determined to free themselves from the yoke of the Protector.

Although Somerset courted the people, the interest which he had aroused in them was in no degree answerable to his expectations. The Catholic party, who retained influence with the lower classes, were his declared enemies, and took advantage of every opportunity to decry his conduct. The attainder and execution of his brother bore an odious aspect. The introduction of foreign troops into the kingdom was represented in invidious colours; and the great estate which he had suddenly acquired, at the expense of the Church and Crown, rendered him obnoxious. But the final blow to his popularity was given by the magnificent palace which

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